

<i>Commenter</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	I support the purchase of approximately 640 acres of property, adjacent to the Lost River Wildlife Management Area. The opportunity to get land next to a WMA doesn't come around everyday, and to not take advantage of this offer wouldn't be in the best interest of the people of Montana. Please "Thank" the existing landowner for offering it to the people of Montana. I'm sure they did it, so everyone can enjoy the property for years to come.
2	After reading the Draft EA, I support the purchase as proposed in the Draft EA. With the property being located next to the existing Lost River WMA, I believe this is a high priority purchase and will benefit the overall management of the WMA, and the Milk River ecosystem.
3	I understand the latest proposal by MFWP is to purchase 640 acres located 45 miles northwest of Havre and adjacent to the "Lost River Wildlife Management Area." This proposal coming at a cost of \$700,000 to the taxpayers will take land out of productive tax base resulting in another defacto wilderness management nightmare. I would like to go on record as an opponent of this proposal based on the fact that the department managed holdings only garner beneficial use to a limited number of people. To add more lands to this dysfunctional inventory is a violation of the public trust and the negates the requirement to manage for the beneficial use of all resources. The people of Montana need to come first with private property being the foundation of freedom.
4	I believe that our Montana fish wildlife and parks needs to work more closely with our Montana farmers and ranchers and agriculture stewards to promote and preserve our natural resources and wildlife. I do not believe that sustainability of our Montana resources can be preserved by purchasing small allotments, such as this one, but instead should use such funding to work more closely with our Montana citizens in preserving theses valuable resources. I believe making more available and informing current Montana land holders of our different programs through Montana fish and game, that promote agricultural and wildlife cohabitation, is the future answer which will insure not only our natural resources but also our Montana heritage for decades to come. Our natural resources need to be protected, but curtsy needs to be extended to our Montana farmers and ranchers so they may know about these different programs our state offers. Proper stewardship not only promotes agriculture production and sustainability but it also provides a flourishing environment for our native wildlife. By working more closely with our local agriculture groups to inform, educate and create programs which encourage such cohabitation, we can create a better environment for all of our Montana citizens. I believe more good can become of our Montana funds by partnering and creating a better communication forum with our Montana land holders and agriculturists than by purchasing a small lot within one of our Montana waterways. More can be achieved if we band together for a common cause. Our farmers and ranchers hope to pass down our heritage and natural resources to our next generation of Montana citizens, which I believe is the same purpose of our Montana fish wildlife and parks. Why not try and work more closely with each other?

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5	I am writing to express my OPPOSITION to the proposed purchase of approximately 640 acres adjacent to the Lost River WMA. I oppose this because I know that the state of Montana has enough acreage to manage. We do not need to add to it. With approximately 1/3 of the state of Montana either federally or state managed, we truly have reached a saturation point. No more land purchases by FWP, BLM, Forest Service, or any of the other agencies paid for by the citizens of Montana.
6	Please note I am enthusiastically in favor of this acquisition to expand the Lost River WMA. This is an excellent investment in winter range for ungulates and will also conserve habitat for other species. It will also provide additional hunter and recreational access which is essential to maintain the state's robust outdoor recreation economy.
7	Lost River Addition - As we get older, we find that climbing high elevations on the Rocky Mountain Front is no longer an option. We look for areas that we can access on foot to enjoy the wildlife and open lands in Montana. We are in favor of the additional purchase of the Lost River Addition
8	Can't attend the public comment meeting so I thought I would drop you a note voicing support of this land purchase by FWP. I think it is a good fit with the other parcels bought a few years ago plus there are some good grass and cover areas on this property. If I was wealthy I would buy every acre of land I could along any water way in Montana for \$1000 an acre. I can recall when land in the western part of the state was \$500 an acre and now in places along waterways and floodplains it is \$30,000/acre. Speaking of cover and habitat.....I don't know if it has been the same every year since the purchase but I know the first couple years after the Lost River Purchase during the hunting season the areas with the most brush and cover for birds and big game had cattle on them and it was kind of a turn off because we all know that cows and game don't mix very well. It would be nice if the cattle were on the most likely hunting areas at a different time of year (perhaps that isn't practical though).
9	To quote Mark Good, a staunch supporter of wilderness areas and public use of it, I fully support purchasing the parcel of land that "Acquiring the parcel would block up the Wildlife Management Area, conserve native habitat and enhance public access for foot and horse use. It would be a nice addition to the wildlife management area and seems like a proposal we should support." This is regarding the Lost River parcel of land. I cannot attend the Havre meeting on the 16th to voice support in person, I live too far away in Northeast Montana( Culbertson).

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10	<p>I oppose the purchase of an additional 640 acres of land north of Havre. The continued removal of productive ag land will result in more hungry people in the US. Here are some additional reasons I protest this purchase. Food production. We ended 2015 as a net importer of beef and have closed 7 major packing facilities since 2013 across the US. Now USDA want to import <b>fresh</b> beef from Brazil. While wolves and grizzly bears eat fresh American beef and lamb, millions of US citizens are forced to eat beef from Argentina, Brazil, Nicaragua and lamb from Uruguay (see picture below of beef package purchased in Great Falls Montana.). So for the record we are a net importer of beef (see item A below), lamb, China would like to trade us chickens and they own 25% of the US pork production with the purchase of Smithfield Foods. This is not sustainable and is not good for future generations. Here are some links that demonstrate the “Globalization of the US food supply”. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) agreed to open up our market to fresh beef imports from Brazil despite concerns for Foot and Mouth Disease and food safety. (<a href="http://www.cattlenetwork.com/news/industry/us-opens-brazil-fresh-beef-imports">http://www.cattlenetwork.com/news/industry/us-opens-brazil-fresh-beef-imports</a>. USDA approves the importation of fresh lamb from Uruguay. Uruguay has also carries Foot and Mouth Disease also.<a href="http://www.strtrade.com/news-publications-Uruguay-sheep-lamb-mutton-imports-111413.html">http://www.strtrade.com/news-publications-Uruguay-sheep-lamb-mutton-imports-111413.html</a>. China purchases swine industry China's Shuanghui International bought Smithfield Foods Inc SFD.N for \$7.1 billion. Smithfield owns 15 million hogs and processes 27 million hogs annually, effectively controlling 25% of the hogs in the US. <a href="http://www.thenewamerican.com/economy/markets/item/16544-chinese-state-owned-company-purchases-smithfield-foods">http://www.thenewamerican.com/economy/markets/item/16544-chinese-state-owned-company-purchases-smithfield-foods</a> HabitatThe habitat in Montana is being overrun by noxious weeds. The Smith, Milk, Teton, and Missouri Rivers are all inundated with leafy spurge. Spotted Knapweed has made a huge advance across Montana’s rangelands. The noxious weeds in Montana continue to expand at their biological potential mainly because we have removed domestic sheep grazing from the Montana environment. Economy The economy of Montana is sinking. The gas industry, coal industry, and ag industry are all down. Farm income in the US is down \$30 BILLION in 2016 alone. We are leaving future generations with a \$3.6 Trillion infrastructure debt (<a href="http://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/">http://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/</a>). How will we pay for the maintenance of roads, irrigations systems, and schools without a vibrant economy? Where does the money come from? The Land Water Conservation Fund, Dingell-Johnson Act and Pittman-Robertson Act We are \$19.5 Trillion in debt and Congressional Budget Office (<a href="http://www.fixthedebt.org/blog/its-official-the-era-of-declining-deficits-is-over_1#.V9MyZvkrLcs">http://www.fixthedebt.org/blog/its-official-the-era-of-declining-deficits-is-over_1#.V9MyZvkrLcs</a>) has estimated our deficit for 2016 will \$590 BILLION up 35% from 2015. Under current federal law 62% of every tax dollar is spent on mandatory spending (medical cost, Social Security, Unemployment and Food assistance etc.). When you factor in military spending it consumes the majority of the other 38% of a federal tax dollar. Thus the money to fund these Funds and Acts is part of the annual deficit and is thus being charged to future generations. It is called generational stealing when one generation is unwilling to pay for its actions and passes it on to the next generation (<a href="http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/8-crazy-facts-about-the-national-debt/article/2598352">http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/8-crazy-facts-about-the-national-debt/article/2598352</a>). Here is a suggestion, it was greed that caused the first purchase of land in North Hill County, and now we are here because greed is causing the second purchase. Sell the property and take care of what you have. Organic Beef purchased in Great Falls Walmart: Product of USA, Australia, and Uruguay.</p>

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11	I am writing to protest this new acquisition. I do not feel that the government should be using tax payer dollars to purchase more land. The Constitution states the government should not own land and I truly believe in that. I believe tax payer dollars can be put to better use than this purchase. Private citizens are the best stewards of the land and always will be.
12	I'm writing to give my comments on the proposed 640 acre purchase in northern Hill county about 45 miles northwest of Havre. I am adamantly against this additional purchase. It is not the intention of the State of Montana to have the purpose of the Fish Wildlife and Parks to be land owners and managers. Right now the Federal and State government already owns more land than it can afford to manage. The best owners and managers of land are the private individuals because our incentive is to leave it in better shape for the next generation of our kids. It is not a 9-5 job for us. It is around the clock, where we live, who we are and what we want to leave for our children – way of life. I am very opposed to the purchase of this 640 acre parcel by the Fish Wildlife and Parks or any other government entity.
13	I hope the proposed purchase of additional land goes thru. The seller is willing and the additional land is a hand-in-glove fit for the existing management area
14	As a former resident and present owner of land adjacent to the the Rookery WMA, I am in favor of the land addition to the Lost River WMA. While the price is high, the benefit of securing the several parcels makes the area very sustainable and valuable for conservation and recreation for many generations. "They aren't making more of this land" and we need to jump at the chance when it is presented to us. I'm afraid these opportunities will become even more difficult in the future.
15	I am writing to express support for MT FWP's proposed purchase of land adjoining the existing Lost River WMA. I recently hiked for the first time in northeast Montana on BLM land north of Malta. This remote prairie and canyon country provided as fine an outdoor recreational experience as the mountainous and forested areas I've primarily spent time exploring over more than 40 years in the western part of the state. I think it is important to create more opportunities for people to appreciate and learn about prairie environments and to preserve the ecological systems these areas support.
16	We support the purchase of private land adjacent to the Lost River WMA. We hiked the Lost River WMA this summer and were very impressed with its prairie and riparian beauty. It would be good to add the adjacent land for easier access but also to maintain wildlife corridors. I am told that the proposed WMA addition is being sold by a willing landowner at a fair price and believe the MFWP should purchase this addition for the benefit for all humans and wildlife alike

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17	<p>Please accept these comments for the record regarding the proposal to purchase 640 acres of private land as an addition to the Lost River Wildlife Management Area. I completely,enthusiastically support this proposal for a number of reasons.1. For my self, I frequently recreate on FWP Wildlife Management Areas. There I enjoy viewing wildlife and taking scenic photos. I really appreciate the fact that these wildlife management areas are not noisy with motorized off road vehicles. I appreciate the fact that our Wildlife Management Areas preserve a wide variety of landscape types, from mountains, to prairies, to breaks and badlands. My recreation on Wildlife Management Areas is done by walking and bicycling.2. Purchase of this proposed addition will make access easier for myself and many other users. Access to adjacent public lands will also be improved.3. For the wildlife that depends on this habitat the purchase of this property will insure that their home will not be developed or industrialized. It insures that the landscape will be improved by FWP to enhance wildlife habitat.4. Recently I was on a weekend camping trip in the Milk River Country ( I live in Helena) I love the kind of wide open prairie and river bottom land seen along the Milk River. I am thrilled that this purchase proposal would help preserve some of that land.5. As a native Montana resident I have always been supportive of FWP efforts to purchase and preserve land for wildlife habitat.As they say, "they ain't making any more of it" so I support spending my tax dollars on these projects.Thanks so much and Good Luck with this excellent purchase proposal.</p>
18	<p>As someone who opposed the Milk River Ranch purchase in the beginning, because I felt it was overpriced, and would be under-utilized, I'm actually in favor of this purchase. This purchase should have happened in the beginning. This parcel was crucial, to make the WMA workable; as it is right in the middle of the WMA. Some will say that access is an issue, but the real story is this parcel creates access to the balance of the WMA. I'd like to speak to the issue of the appraisal. I find it interesting that Mr Thayer chose not to appraise this property, as he was the yellow book appraiser on the Milk River ranch and deemed the river frontage as "recreational land" at \$1900/acre. Additionally, the title was clouded with archeological and paleontological rights reserved. Here is my problem; this property is being appraised at considerably less with NO reservations on the title. So, what does this say? Is it about the land or who you are when it comes to appraising properties for FWP's purchases of land? it would be my argument that this parcel should have the same price point as the Milk River Ranch, maybe even higher with a clear title.</p>
19	<p>The proposed addition to the Lost River WMA sounds like a good idea to me. It would make for better hiker and horse access and avoid the need to skirt private property on the east. This property will link the WMA to existing public land and maintain a viable wildlife corridor. It provides further protection of the aesthetics and natural character of the river access. Hikers who have used the WMA have been favorably impressed with its wild character and beauty. Please take this opportunity to acquire the property.</p>

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20	<p>I support Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks proposal to purchase 640 acres of private land adjacent to the Lost River Wildlife Management Area (WMA) for the following reasons: • This addition could improve access for foot and equestrian use to adjacent public land for hunting, hiking, fishing, wildlife viewing, and other recreational activities. • It can help protect valuable wildlife habitats from the threat of development by connecting the WMA and surrounding public land to conserve native habitat, and help protect and enhance mule deer, pronghorn antelope, white-tailed deer, elk, ring-necked pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse, Hungarian partridge, waterfowl populations and others. • By maintaining the Milk River wildlife corridor it provides for connectivity and genetic diversity of wildlife populations. • It is important to enhance and preserve the natural beauty of the Milk River frontage. • We should value the historic and cultural significance of any Native American artifacts or historic sites that may be there. I appreciate your consideration of these comments in your decision making process.</p>
21	<p>Why are these meetings that FWP have on purchasing land always after the fact that it has been done or about to be done? Also why aren't the head honcho's at the meetings to answer questions rather than putting someone on the spot that doesn't have the answers. Why wasn't the public made aware of the base hunting license fee. There are several upset hunters along the hi-line that didn't get their permits for lack of not paying the fee. Another one was the increase in fishing license for senior citizens.</p>
22	<p>I support the acquisition. I hear no valid objections tonight (at the public meeting)</p>
23	<p>I support the purchase of the 640 acres of private property at Lost Rive WMA. While it may be debated that the price is too high, or that it is too low compared to the first Ageson deal, that needs to be decided by others. I believe in the conservation efforts the MTFWP is pursuing, especially in light of the pace of development occurring on much of our Montana lands. This piece of land being owned by the state makes sense because it is completely surrounded by state land and the Lost River WMA. This will give much better access to the rest of the WMA for the public.</p>
24	<p>Please support the purchase of the 640 acres adjacent to Lost River WMA.</p>
25	<p>The Montana Farm Bureau Federation (MFBF) appreciates the opportunity to comment on this draft environmental assessment. MFBF is Montana's largest agricultural organization representing farmers and ranchers from across Montana. We can appreciate the statutory responsibility of Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to protect, enhance and regulate Montana's fish and wildlife resources, but we are opposed to FWP's acquisition of additional acres near the Lost River Wildlife Management Area. That statutory obligation applies to more than purchasing land and there are other areas where the focus and resource should concentrate. FWP already owns a large amount of land throughout Montana. More emphasis should be put on enhancing those acres by implementing aggressive and active weed control programs. Additionally, this statute also applies to the management of Montana's wildlife populations. Instead of purchasing additional land, we urge FWP to spend these resources addressing current wildlife management issues, including the continued increase in the state's elk population and the impacts to private and public lands. It is a priority for Montana Farm Bureau to protect and preserve farming and ranching in Montana. Our policy opposes FWP acquiring additional acreage and removing it from production agriculture. Again, we thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft environmental assessment.</p>

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26	<p>I am writing to comment in favor of the Proposed Addition to the Lost River WMA. With a continuing increase in demand for public land, I believe this proposed addition is a tremendous opportunity to preserve more pristine prairie and riparian areas along the Montana/Alberta, Canada border. To provide corridors of movement for wildlife is important to their survival and well-being. The preservation of the riparian areas enhances the habitat for many species of birds as well as other wildlife. This addition will enhance the opportunities for hiking, bird watching and hunting. It will also enhance FWP's ability to manage wildlife.</p>
27	<p>Most Montanans value and treasure public lands for recreational use, whether it be for hunting, hiking, bird watching...that's why we live here and why people move to Montana. I am writing to comment in favor of the Proposed Addition to the Lost River WMA. This is a wonderful opportunity to preserve more pristine prairie and riparian areas along the Milk River, on the Montana/Alberta, Canada border. The preservation of this pristine riparian area and its adjoining prairie, will enhance the habitat for many species of birds as well as other wildlife. Providing corridors of movement for wildlife is critical to their survival and well-being. This addition will also enhance FWP's ability to manage wildlife. If one looks at the public land opportunities in our State, North-Central Montana has fewer opportunities than many other regions and it is appropriate that the people living in our area have the opportunity to enjoy public land as well. The purchase comes with mineral rights for this property. Having both surface rights and mineral rights will ensure that this property is more easily protected long-term. On page one of the EA, the document seems to indicate that Russian olive is part of the native habitat in the floodplain. It is actually an introduced species that, long-term, can become a monoculture over time. Removal of Russian olive in the WMA may be desirable. We would like FWP, as much as possible, to manage the Lost River WMA parcel for its native habitat. It is especially important for FWP to manage its wetland and riparian lands in a way that allows recreationists to access the area, but also protect this important habitat for both fish and wildlife habitat.</p>

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28	<p>Please accept the following comments from Montana Audubon regarding the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Lost River Wildlife Management Area Fee Title Acquisition. Montana Audubon is the coordinating entity for the nine Audubon Society Chapters in the state of Montana. Currently, there are approximately 5,400 Audubon members in the state. Our mission is to protect birds and other wildlife, and their habitats. You may receive comments from other members of the Society. The project proposes to purchase 640 acres of land adjacent to the Lost River Wildlife Management Area (WMA) northwest of Havre along the Milk River. Montana Audubon supports Montana Fish, Wildlife &amp; Parks' (FWP) purchase of this property in particular we support this proposal because: The property will increase the amount of existing contiguous fish and wildlife habitat protected in the area (creating a 9,000+ acre bloc of protected habitat. This would add to the existing 3,000-acre Lost River WMA. The river corridor being protected through this project would protect about 250 acres of wetland/riparian/floodplain habitat, the most critical habitat for wildlife in the state. Approximately 270 acres of mixed-grass prairie would be protected with this purchase, which is an important habitat type in the area. The fact that this habitat is intact makes management easier (less restoration will be required). The purchase would benefit 20 identified Species of Concern including many prairie species like the McCown's Longspur, Sprague's Pipit, Burrowing Owl, Ferruginous Hawk, Golden Eagle, Swift Fox, and many more. The property is within a high-priority, identified wildlife linkage area between Canada and Fresno Reservoir. Big game animals that would benefit from this acquisition include elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, and antelope. Many nongame wildlife species would benefit from long-term protection of this area. FWP would prevent this property from being developed long-term protection of this area. FWP would prevent this property from being developed long-term, with limited development (no development plans were outlined in the EA).</p>
29	<p>I would like to speak out in favor of the purchase of land adjacent to the Lost River WMA. This addition will improve accessibility and contribute towards the purpose of the WMA of protecting a very special wildlife habitat and maintenance of the wildlife habitat. The purchase simply makes good sense given the commitment to the WMA already made.</p>



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30	<p>I am in favor of fee title acquisition of a 640-acre parcel of land adjacent to the Lost River Wildlife Management Area (Lost River WMA). Funding USFWS Pittman-Robertson \$525,000 (75%) Habitat Montana Fund 175,000 (25%) Total \$700,000 <b>Why I supp support the proposal:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Improve Access for foot and horse use</b> - Acquiring the property will provide access to this area, and the adjacent public land, for hunting, hiking, fishing, wildlife viewing and other recreational activities. Currently the public has to skirt around the private property to access the Lost River WMA from the east.</li> <li>• <b>Protect valuable wildlife habitats from the threat of development</b> - Acquiring the isolated parcel would connect the WMA and surrounding public land to conserve native habitat. Conserving these native habitats and instituting wildlife-friendly management practices would help protect and enhance mule deer, pronghorn antelope, white-tailed deer, elk, ring-necked pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse, Hungarian partridge, and waterfowl populations, in addition to conserving habitat for many other species of grassland and riparian songbirds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and fish.</li> <li>• <b>Maintain wildlife corridors</b> - Conservation of the wildlife values of this parcel would help maintain the viability of the Milk River corridor for maintaining connectivity and genetic diversity of wildlife populations.</li> <li>• <b>Aesthetics</b> - The natural beauty of the Milk River frontage would be enhanced and preserved.</li> <li>• <b>Historic/Cultural Values</b> – Although no formal inventory of artifacts and historic sites has been conducted on the property, incidental field observations indicate evidence of past Native American use. Agricultural conversion and other ground-breaking activities would be prevented to protect historic and cultural resources.</li> </ul>
31	<p>Dear Commissioners, The Montana Wildlife Federation is our state’s oldest wildlife conservation organization, with eight decades of working for wildlife. We work to ensure abundant wildlife and habitat. To that end, we strongly support the proposed addition of 640 acres to the Lost River Wildlife Management Area in Hill County, roughly 45 miles northwest of Havre. This project has numerous values that will benefit wildlife, as well as public hunting access and wildlife watching opportunities. It would provide easier access to the Lost River WMA than the current situation in which the public is forced to go around private property. It would further protect the land from development that would fracture wildlife habitat. And it would keep intact the Milk River riparian wildlife corridor, which provides incredible habitat not only for game species such as mule deer and white-tailed deer, but also non-game species of birds and numerous other species. Furthermore, the project would protect the viewshed of the Milk River. And it would ensure that any prehistoric and historic archaeological sites on the property would be protected. We urge the Commission to approve this project and build on the conservation values of the Lost River WMA to ensure abundant wildlife and public hunting and wildlife watching opportunities for future generations.</p>

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32	<p>On behalf of the Montana Stockgrowers Association (MSGA), I am providing comments regarding the Draft Lost River Wildlife Management Area Fee Title Acquisition EA. Our association had previously developed membership policy that recognized the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) has authority to purchase fee title land in Montana to be used for wildlife management areas. MSGA is concerned these purchases by the state and federal government erode local tax bases and has a significant impact on the neighboring ranches. MSGA has consistently advocated for a “No Net Acreage Gain” provision concerning FWP fee title ownership of wildlife management areas. In addition to the fee title additions, MSGA is also concerned about the agency having adequate financial resources to manage additional land acquisitions. These costs could include weed control, fencing, road maintenance and others. While some of these issues are mentioned in the EA, there needs to be additional information regarding the projected funds that will be necessary to adequately manage these lands. With additional land purchases, there are also questions regarding the reduction of maintenance funds for current FWP lands. MSGA has also reviewed the purchase price offered for this acreage. MSGA feels the value of this fee title acquisition will have negative impacts to market rate inflation for similar tracts of agriculture land. MSGA does appreciate the environmental assessment process, as we supported this adjustment to FWP’s land acquisition process in previous legislative sessions (SB 230). However, due to the aforementioned concerns we are compelled to oppose transactions of this nature until “no net acreage gain” procedures are designed. I would like to thank FWP for reviewing our comments and considering these points as a decision is finalized.</p>
33	<p>I would just like to voice my support for the purchase of the additional 640 acres of private land that is adjacent to the WMA Lost River area. This past summer I went on a hike with the Montana Wilderness Association to the Lost River area. It was spectacularly beautiful. A beauty that is different from the mountains. We learned a lot from a local landowner who is committed to preserving the area. There is a bounty of historical artifacts and a rich history of the area. And I was impressed to learn of the abundant diversity and health of the native species in the region. It was a memorable hike and certainly made me proud to live in the central plains region of the state. I believe that many Montanans would support this addition the more they learn about it and are able to access and hike it.</p>
34	<p>We are in favor of the proposed addition to the Lost River WMA. In the past years we have seen a large increase of hunters and other sportsmen using the Lost River WMA. We have received tremendous feedback from neighbors and those coming from a far.</p>
35	<p>Thank you for providing this opportunity to comment on the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Wildlife Division, Draft Environmental Assessment for the Lost River Wildlife Management Area Fee Title Acquisition. These substantive comments are submitted during the 30-day comment period by the Montana Wilderness Association (MWA). As outlined in the EA, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks is proposing to purchase 640 acres of private land adjacent to the Lost River Wildlife Management Area that would be an addition to the WMA. This isolated parcel of land is being sold by a willing landowner and represents one of a few areas along the Milk River corridor that are managed explicitly for wildlife and conservation values. The MWA Island Range Chapter is dedicated to protecting central Montana’s natural</p>

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	<p>resources, wilderness quality lands, habitat for native wildlife and bird species, rivers, streams, riparian areas and wetlands, historic and cultural properties, and traditional recreational opportunities, including but not limited to backcountry hiking, hunting, and wildlife viewing. Members and employees of MWA have used and will continue to use the Lost River Wildlife Management Area for these purposes. Over the past two years, hikes to the Lost River WMA, have been offered through MWA' Wilderness Walks program. The MWA Island Range Chapter seeks to protect the natural and biological integrity of the area, as well as the recreation opportunities offered in the WMA. We are supportive of FWP's efforts to purchase this isolated 640-acre parcel to improve access for foot and horse use, and permanently protect wildlife habitat, scenic values, historic and cultural values, and maintain the connectivity of the Milk River wildlife corridor.</p> <p>• <b>Access</b> - Acquiring the parcel will improve foot and horse access to the WMA and the adjacent State School Trust Land. Currently the public has to skirt around the private property to access the Lost River WMA from the east. The acquisition will also ensure that the public has greater access to the Milk River corridor. As noted in the EA, a majority of land along the Milk River in Montana is in private ownership, and access for hunters along the Milk River, in North-Central Montana, has decreased in recent years. The limited and decreasing access to the Milk River corridor makes places like the Lost River WMA more valuable to the public.</p> <p>• <b>Protect valuable wildlife habitats from the threat of development</b> - Milk River riparian habitats are valued for their abundant wildlife and recreational opportunities. Acquiring this isolated parcel would connect the WMA and surrounding public land and help conserve native habitat. The proposed acquisition, coupled with wildlife-friendly management practises, will ensure that wildlife and wildlife habitat are protected and enhanced. As stated in the EA, the wildlife benefiting from the acquisition include mule deer, pronghorn antelope, white-tailed deer, elk, ring-necked pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse, Hungarian partridge, and waterfowl populations. In addition, the acquisition will help conserve habitat for many other species of grassland and riparian songbirds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and fish. Fortunately, at this time, there are no imminent threats to the area, but it is impossible to predict how the parcel could change without protective management. Agricultural conversion of native rangeland, pipelines, transmission lines, communication towers, subdivision of property, buildings, new roads, airstrips, wind farms, new types of off-road vehicles are all changes that are readily viewed across Montana's landscape. If the parcel were to be managed for another use, one inconsistent with protecting wildlife and wildlife habitat, it could adversely affect the entire wildlife management area. Also evident is the constant change in land ownership which affects management and access. The acquisition will ensure that this parcel is managed primarily to protect wildlife and conservation values over the long run, while also providing access in perpetuity.</p> <p>• <b>Maintain wildlife corridors</b> - Conservation of the wildlife values of this parcel would also ensure consistent management and help maintain the viability of the Milk River corridor by maintaining connectivity and genetic diversity of wildlife populations.</p> <p>• <b>Aesthetics</b> - The natural beauty of the Milk River frontage would be enhanced and preserved.</p> <p>• <b>Historic/Cultural Values</b> – Although no formal inventory of artifacts and historic sites has been conducted on the property, incidental field observations by MWA members and others indicate evidence of past Native American use, traders and settlers. The Hi-Line is considered by Bureau of Land Management archaeologists to have one of the highest concentrations of historic sites and human artifacts in North America. And with a long history</p>

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	<p>of human use documented in the Sweet Grass Hills and other places along the Milk River such as Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park, as well as the Lost River WMA, it is reasonable to assume that historic sites and artifacts exist on the proposed acquisition. While the intent of a wildlife management area is to manage primarily for wildlife and wildlife habitat, the same protective measure applied WMA would prevent agricultural conversion and other ground disturbance activities and help ensure that historic and cultural resources are protected.</p> <p>• <b>Land Values</b> - We want to thank FWP for pursuing this acquisition. Negotiating a fair price for both buyer and seller can be complicated and difficult. While some members of the public will never be satisfied with the sale price arrived at through the appraisal, it would be helpful to know what factors were considered and evaluated in the appraisal, and why the appraisal for the WMA differs from the amount agreed upon for the parcel.</p> <p>• <b>Public Lands and Economic benefits</b> – Although it would difficult to calculate the economic value of the Lost River WMA and this one parcel specifically, it is important to recognize that public lands contribute to local economies. For example, an economic analysis prepared by Headwaters Economics, September 2016, shows that in one hunting district alone, HD 410, almost 2.3 million dollars in expenditures by hunters was spent just on elk hunting during the 2015 hunting season. This is a hunting district with a large concentration of public land. There is also a large body of peer-reviewed literature that examines the relationship between natural amenities, land conservation, and local and regional economic well-being and has also concluded that protected public lands can extend beyond tourism and recreation to attract people and businesses across a range of sectors critical to our economic future. Protected public lands are a feature that makes communities attractive and helps attract and hold residents. Conserving Montana’s public land assets is an important step toward securing the state’s economic vibrancy and quality of life. A sustained effort to protect wildlife and increase outdoor recreation will provide direct benefits, including hundreds of jobs in both cities and rural communities across Montana.</p> <p><b>Final comments</b> – MWA believes this acquisition is in the public interest for reasons described above and consistent with the purpose of a Wildlife Management Area – to maintain vital wildlife habitat for the protection of species and the enjoyment of the public. Worldwide, grasslands are one of the most endangered land types, and Montana has some of the last blocks of unbroken prairie on all the Great Plains. The vast majority of the land in this part of the state is private and managed for agricultural production. The acquisition provides an opportunity to conserve a small but valuable piece of some of the last unbroken prairie. FWP should take advantage of this opportunity because they may never have another opportunity to acquire this parcel and if they do it most certainly will be more expensive. Thank you for providing this opportunity to comment on the draft EA. We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to participate in this and other important decisions affecting state lands in Montana. We hope you find these comments to be helpful, informative, and useful in your decision. If you have any questions or comments, or wish to discuss the issues raised in this comment letter in greater detail, please do not hesitate to contact me.</p>

<i>Commenter</i>	<i>Comment</i>
36	<p>I am writing this to express my disappointment in the appraisal price for the new land acquisition right smack in the middle of the Lost River Ranch. The original purchase price of approximately \$1574/acre was way out of line and yet shoved down all our throats by our dishonest governor Brian S. (a former friend of mine). That cannot be changed now but I strongly believe that any new acquisitions bordering, touching or surrounded by the Lost River Ranch should come with a price tag of equal to or more than \$1574/acre. The land currently in the works is basically surrounded and would be a perfect addition to the Lost River Ranch.....Thus making it "more" valuable. I understand the position of the appraisers leaving out the purchase price of the Lost River Ranch because of the soiled nature of the acquisition but I do think it should have been included in the calculations regardless. This new addition is prime river front property, both sides of the river, and makes the Lost River Ranch more contiguous. I am requesting that the FWP pay an amount closer to the purchase price of the original Lost River Ranch acquisition. I believe it is fair and just. Now, from here on out I expect total transparency and truth from FWP, Its commissioners, the director, and especially the current and future governors. I don't think that is too much to ask for.</p>
37	<p>I'm in favor of the purchase of 640 acres of private land to provide access to the Lost River WMA. This purchase is necessary to provide good public access to the WMA. This is a great opportunity, and I hope FWP takes advantage of it.</p>
38	<p>I would like to express my support for the acquisition by FWP of private land from a willing seller to expand the Lost River Wildlife Management Area by 640 acres. Montana needs to take advantage of these rare opportunities to protect critical wildlife habitats wherever possible because development knows no boundaries and is usually irreversible. This addition makes sense on so many levels and for so many reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve access for foot and horse use - Acquiring the property will provide access to this area and the adjacent public land, for hunting, hiking, fishing, wildlife viewing and other recreational activities. Currently the public has to skirt around the private property to access the Lost River WMA from the east.</li> <li>• Protect valuable wildlife habitats from the threat of development - Acquiring the isolated parcel would connect the WMA and surrounding public land to conserve native habitat. Conserving these native habitats and instituting wildlife-friendly management practices would help protect and enhance mule deer, pronghorn antelope, white-tailed deer, elk, ring-necked pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse, Hungarian partridge, and waterfowl populations, in addition to conserving habitat for many other species of grassland and riparian songbirds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and fish.</li> <li>• Maintain wildlife corridors - Conservation of the wildlife values of this parcel would help maintain the viability of the Milk River corridor for connectivity and genetic diversity of wildlife populations.</li> <li>• Aesthetics - The natural beauty of the Milk River frontage would be enhanced and preserved.</li> </ul>